Jenna Rendeiro

LENS 1

Purpose: To explore the positive aspects *Dear Mr. Henshaw* incorporates to help relate to children.

Audience: Teachers

Genre: Letter

Engagement: A solid reflection on what I have read and further understanding of the book *Dear Mr. Henshaw* as to why it should be used in schools*.*

*Reader Response: Dear Mr. Henshaw*

Dear Fifth Grade Teachers,

I am writing on behalf of a book that I believe is very beneficial to students, especially since they can all somehow identify with the main character. After reading the book *Dear Mr. Henshaw* by Beverly Cleary, I am extremely fond of books that take a different perspective of getting a story across. I have to admit, when I started reading it, I considered the reoccurring title “Dear Mr. Henshaw,” tedious. As the book went on, I really began to appreciate the way it was written. It shows children how to write letters and even the benefits of writing in a journal or a diary for personal use.

Leigh Botts is a student that has been inspired to write by Boyd Henshaw, his favorite author. Although authors will probably not become steady pen pals with an elementary fan, it is an exciting fantasy to read about. It reminds me of second grade when everyone in my class got paired up with someone in another second grade class in a different school to be pen pals with. It was so exciting to learn about someone I had not met. I believe it would be a great idea to read this book in a classroom and then set up a pen pal experience for the students. They would have a blast and be learning at the same time.

I also find that writing can be really helpful for young children. Growing up can be a very stressful and exciting adventure. Throughout this book, I see Leigh writing to cope. This is a very good lesson for children because instead of keeping all the feelings inside, they can write it down and get it out. Writing is a very helpful way to understand one’s feelings. In Leigh’s case, his parents are divorced and many kids have trouble dealing with that same situation. For example, Leigh calls his dad when he has not kept his promise to call and ends up hearing another boy ask when they are going to get pizza. He instantly felt replaced and overwhelmed saying, “I felt as if my insides were falling out. I hung up. I didn’t want to hear any more…” (72). Children will be able to relate to the hardships Leigh is going through, which will help them cope and understand as well. Furthermore, it is after this incident that Leigh knows how to express his feelings on paper: “I have learned to say what I think on a piece of paper.” (73) It was at that moment that he did not have to write to a *Pretend Mr. Henshaw* any longer and transitioned into writing as himself, for himself.

As described in *The Pleasures of Reading Children’s Literature* by Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer, the pleasure of reading can take many different forms. Dear Mr. Henshaw offers children different pleasure than many other books they would be expected to read. For example, the book does not end with a “happily ever after,” but with more of a realistic closure. Leigh is much more mature at the end of the story and works through a lot of his problems, even though the ending is not ideal for him. The two pleasures I connect with *Dear Mr. Henshaw* are: “The pleasure of having one’s emotions evoked: laughing at a comic situation, being made to feel the pain or the joy a character experiences and the pleasure of finding a mirror for oneself- of identifying with fictional characters.” (*Pleasures*, 25) Children in fifth grade are making a lot of transitions at that point in their lives. No matter what way, although not everyone will be the same, every student will connect to Leigh Botts and appreciate the trials he is going through. This book will give them a sense of belonging and realize that everyone has problems or are faced with situations that are not ideal.

Lastly, I would like to bring up a question posed in chapter three of *The Pleasures of Reading Children’s Literature*: “How would the events of a story seem different if we heard them in a different order or if they were told from the point of view of a different character?” (45) Great lessons can be learned by posing this question to students after reading and reflecting on *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. It will allow students to then reflect on their own situations and figure out how other people involved may be feeling. Questions such as the latter can get kids to build a deeper meaning within texts and even their own lives.

Warm Regards,

Jenna Rendeiro